U.S. Doubts Reds Closing A-Arms Gap

By George C. Wilson
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The Pentagon put the unthinkable on paper yesterday and concluded that Soviet ICBMs could destroy only 10 per cent of U.S. land-based missiles in a first nuclear strike.

Paul H. Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense, estimated that Russia's present force of "less than 500 reliable ICBMs" would knock out only 100 of our 1000 Minuteman missiles in such a nuclear war.

He said the surviving 900 Minuteman ICBMs, Polaris and Poseidon sea-based missiles and bombers could retaliate by dropping more than 2000 bombs on the Soviet

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Union—killing "almost half the population."

Nitze did this chilling arithmetic at the request of the Military Applications Subcommittee.

Subcommittee Chairman Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) had asked the Pentagon to rebut charges by Rep. Craig Hosmer (R-Calif.) that the Soviet Union was fast closing the gap on the United States in nuclear weaponry. Hosmer, using relative megatonnage as one of his yardsticks, said it was time for the United States to build more missiles.

Nitze, in a three-page statement containing many previously secret estimates, said "the number of warheads, reliability, survivability and accuracy" were more meaningful factors than sheer explosive power.

Even with Russia increasing missile production, Nitze said, her "large ICBM force" in 1973 could destroy about 300 of the 1000 Minuteman missiles in their silos.

He said Russia—like the United States — is stressing small warheads on ICBMs. The Soviet Union Minuteman is the SS-11. Both ICBMs have a warhead of about one megaton. Nitze predicted "more than half" the Soviet ICBM force will be SS-11s by 1973.

Multiple Warheads

To make up for the Soviets' increased production of ICBMs, the U.S. is putting more warheads on its existing force of missiles. Minuteman 2 multiple warheads already are in production. The Minuteman 3 to follow it will have multiple, independently targetable re-entry vehicles, or MIRV. This is the Pentagon term for breaking one big warhead into several little ones, each of which goes to a different target.

The Poseidon missile to replace earlier Polaris missiles on nuclear submarines will also have multiple warheads —with as many as 16 on one missile.

Nitze said the United States could choose between putting 10 bombs of 50 kilotons each on one missle or one big bomb of 10 megatons for the same missile.

The separately aimed 50-kiloton bombs, he said, would destroy 10 times as many airfields as the one big bomb; 1.2 to 1.7 times as many hard missile silos, and 3.5 times as many cities of 100,000 population. The single big bomb would be more lethal against bigger cities, he said. But he said the U.S. could use other weapons for the big bang—presumably the 10-megaton bombs carried by B-52s.

Defending Missiles

Another advantage of multiple warheads, Nitze said, is that they exhaust the supply of defending missiles that much faster so the next wave of offensive missiles can fly to their targets unimpeded.

The three independent "assured destruction" forces the United States has—land- and sea-based missiles plus bombers—assure continued nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union, Nitze said.

The superiority question arose again in the Military Applications Subcommittee yesterday when Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, reported on Soviet military advances.

Jackson said after the closed session that it was "a sobering presentation." He said the Soviets are closing the gaps in their strategic and limited war forces, both in offensive and defensive weaponry and in manpower.

New Orbital Rocket

The Russians have underscored their progress by testing a new orbital rocket in space and by parading for the first time Tuesday the SS-9 ICBM — capable of carrying about 25 megatons.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the subcommittee yesterday the orbital rocket was not as terrifying right now as existing Soviet weapons but "could grow to be a threat of considerable proportions."

This concern indicates military leaders will press for development of anti-satellite weapons to counter the threat of orbital bombs.

While working on the defense, the United States is also trying to improve on MIRV and other advanced concepts to assure that our missiles get through any enemy defense.

One such new concept is slated to be test flown Friday. It is called the Boost Glide Re-entry Vehicle, or BGRV, and is designed to fool the defense by pulling out of its trajectory and gliding into the target at low altitude.

An Atlas booster is slated to launch BGRV from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.